

# THE DEEP DWELLERS

*The subterranean dwellers of various ancient religious and mythical traditions have parallels with the underworld beings of modern-day accounts.*

## Part 1

by Wm Michael Mott © 2000

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### SUBSURFACE INHABITANTS IN FOLKLORE, MYTH AND LITERATURE

The legends, myths and literature of mankind have always been filled with fanciful or terrifying accounts of underground lands and races, hidden from surface sight. Rumours of a largely unseen reality, of cavern worlds, hidden tunnel systems which criss-cross the globe, and the occasional accidental discovery of a large geode structure within the Earth, have migrated from the realms of folklore and early scientific speculation into literature—and perhaps back into folklore again.

When reading and studying the available fiction which touches upon the topic of a subterranean world, many similarities come to light. This is interesting insofar as the various writers were not necessarily familiar with one another's works. It is obvious that many of them drew upon folktales and mythology as well as the latest scientific findings and theories of the day; indeed, they had a huge matrix of archetypes and forms with which to work.

Religious traditions have also been a major influence on the development of fiction about subterranean worlds and inhabitants, and some brave souls have shared accounts of what they believed to be their own encounters with the denizens that dwell within the Earth's crust.

In this work, all of these aspects of underworld studies, and more, will come under careful examination, but this is not so much an examination of the underworlds as it is of their inhabitants.

### MYTHICAL (ANCIENT RELIGIOUS) ACCOUNTS

#### 1. The East

One of the earliest examples of subterranean stories is to be found in the Gilgamesh cycle of stories, which some would say is not so much fictitious as it is a distorted account of ancient events.

Gilgamesh was an actual king who ruled Uruk (also called Unug) about 2600 BC, and he was supposedly of half-divine origin. Like other heroes of ancient mythic cycles who were demigods, or semi-divine, Gilgamesh longed for an immortality which he saw as his birthright, much the same as Heracles of the Greeks. In one tale from his cycle, he befriends a physically powerful, hairy, subhuman character named Enkidu and teaches him the customs of humanity. In a later tale, Enkidu, on behalf of his friend and king, agrees to venture into the underworld of ancient Mesopotamia to search for someone who has the secret of immortality.

Other Sumerian accounts leave little doubt that the Kur or Ki-Gal ("the Great Below") was a place of immense size and great terror. This realm was ruled by the goddess Ereshkigal and her consort Nergal, a warlike god who had entered her queendom with plans of conquest—only to be seduced by the enemy, who became his wife. The Ki-Gal was said to be filled with a wide range of beings, including spirits and the undead, reanimated bodies of human beings as well as savage guardians called "scorpion men".

Other residents were described as sexless and robotic "artificial" beings called Galatur or Gala, who were used by the rulers of the underworld for missions of kidnapping human beings from the surface world or for other errands. Also present in the underworld were the Utukku, "eagle-headed" reptilian humanoids who are probably the original Djinn and Ifrits of the ancient Middle East. The latter beings were usually depicted with wings, representing their ability to fly when dispatched on the errands of the rulers of the underworld. Another strange race was the Pazuzu, a canine-faced humanoid monstrosity with reptilian scales and tail.

All of these are motifs which in one form or another have been found to permeate nearly every ancient underworld tradition and also have found their way into folklore and literature.

The Asian region, particularly the Indian subcontinent, Tibet, Nepal, China and Japan, has very similar traditions about subterranean inhabitants.

In India, there is still a strong belief in the reality of the Nagas—a race of "serpent people" or "lizard men" who have made their homes in two major underground cities (or civilisations), Bhogavati and Patala.

Bhogavati is believed to be underneath the Himalayas, and it is said that from there the Nagas wage war on other human subterraneans from the subsurface kingdoms of Agharta and Shambala.

Patala is believed by millions of Hindus to this day to have an entrance in the Well of Sheshna in Benares. According to herpetologist and author Sherman A. Minton in his book, *Venomous Reptiles*, this entrance is very real, having 40 steps which descend into a circular depression and then terminate at a closed stone door covered in bas-relief cobras. In Tibet, there is a major mystical shrine, also called Patala, which is said by the people there to sit atop an ancient cavern and tunnel system which reaches throughout the Asian continent and possibly beyond.

The Nagas are believed to have an affinity with water, and the entrances to their underground palaces are said to be hidden often at the bottom of wells, deep lakes and rivers. They are described as a very advanced race or species with a highly developed technology. Among their many devices are "death rays" and *vimana*—flying, disc-shaped aerial craft which are described at length in many ancient Vedic texts including the *Bhagavad-gita* and the *Ramayana*. The Nagas are also believed to harbour a disdain for human beings, whom they are said to abduct, torture, interbreed with and even eat. The interbreeding has supposedly led to a wide variety of forms, ranging from completely reptilian

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to nearly human in appearance. The Naga race is related to another underworld race: the Hindu demons, or Rakshasas.

The Nagas are also said to possess, as individuals, a "magical stone" or "third eye" in the middle of their brow. This is known to students of eastern mysticism as the focal point of one of the higher chakras (energy channel points) of the human(oid) nervous system, and is the chakra associated with inner visions, intuition and other esoteric concepts.

In China, the Lung Wang (Dragon Kings) closely resemble the Nagas in many respects. The Lung were said to dwell either in the "celestial realm", i.e., the stars and planets, or beneath the surface of the Earth. They, too, were said to possess a "magical pearl" in their forehead—a "mystical" or divine eye or source of power. Like the Nagas, some of the entrances to their palaces or kingdoms could be found beneath lakes and rivers or behind waterfalls. Almost always, such entrances were well hidden from the intrusive eyes or feet of mortal men and women. One such entrance to the Chinese underworld was said to be in the "Eastern Mountain" of Taishan, near Qufu province. This entrance to the Chinese Hell was guarded by savage demons called Men Shen, often depicted as warriors wearing fierce, animalistic masks or faces.

There was also interaction between the Lords of Hell, as they were known, and the Dragon Kings. The four Hell Kings, called Yan Luo or Yen Wang (possibly derived from the Hindu death god, Yama), ruled over a vast region consisting of 18 levels or locales. In one tale, a Dragon King is robbed by an extremely clever and human-like Monkey, who is similar in many respects to the Hindu Hanuman (who in turn came into conflict with the Rakshasas of the underworld in the *Ramayana*). Enkidu also comes to mind in this tale. The Dragon King calls on the help of the Yan Luo, who are in turn bested by Monkey as well. The 18 regions of the Chinese netherworld are bureaucratic, tedious systems or civilisations and an apparent mixture of Taoist and Buddhist ideas, with a strong influence from the latter.

The Japanese Hell is even more of an amalgam of different traditions, as it incorporates Chinese, Hindu and Buddhist characteristics into an earlier, animistic Shinto system. Emma-Hoo (perhaps from Yama-Raja) is the king of Jigoku, an eight-levelled region of fire and ice. Jigoku is filled with Oni, or demons, which have the heads of oxen or horses but humanoid bodies.

Japan also has other cavern-dwellers who come out upon occasion. The bird-headed reptilian goblins, the Tengu, dwell in mountainous regions and mostly come out by night. They are experts in the use of the weapons which are in modern times associated with ninjitsu. According to legend, the



A reptilian humanoid in the underworld

Tengu trained Minamoto Yoshitsune, a famed Samurai swordsman of the late 12th century, when he was an exiled boy on the run from his enemies. The Tengu are almost identical in description to the Utukku of Sumerian myth.

Other beings are the Kappa, a semi-aquatic and totally reptilian-looking humanoid dwarf, the "ugly girls of hell" and sundry other shapeshifting entities who dwell underground or under houses. The "fox people" are among the latter, often taking human form and delighting in abduction and seduction of mortals.

The underworld of ancient Egypt has many things in common with its Mesopotamian counterpart. Called the Tuat or Duat, it was ruled by the god of the dead, Osiris, the counterpart of Sumer's Nergal. It is the servants of Osiris, however, who are of concern here. There was the jackal-headed god Khentimentiu and also Anubis, both gods of arcane knowledge, embalming and other sciences. The god of knowledge, Thoth, was also a regular in the Tuat; he had a humanoid form with the head of a baboon (but very canine in appearance). All three of these deities bear a strong resemblance to the Sumerian Pazuzu.

There is also a parallel in the Ushabtiu, originally conceived as artificial, animated and robotic servants who were very similar to the Gala, or Galatur, of the Sumerian underworld. Like the Gala, the Ushabtiu could be dispatched to punish or abduct an ordinary mortal or even the Pharaoh himself. These beings were represented in Egyptian burials by small statues of the same name, mimicking the supernatural servants of Osiris and hopefully providing a retinue of retainers and slaves for the deceased.

Another being with familiar characteristics was Ammut, a blend of crocodile, lion and dog. But possibly the most feared being to haunt the underworld was the god of chaos and strife, Set or Seth, who attempted to mount a *coup d'état* against his brother, Osiris. Set is often considered to be the Egyptian counterpart of the Judaeo-Christian personality known as Satan, his appearance both canine and reptilian with a human form but animalistic head, long-snouted and/or muzzled. The hugest dragon of the Tuat, however, was the gigantic serpent Apophis, very similar to Nidhoggr or Jormungand from the Norse underworlds—a monstrous serpent which brought fear even to the gods.

## 2. The West

Moving into Europe and Scandinavia, the mythical subterraneans became less distant and more immediate, interacting with the common folk on a much more regular basis.

Scandinavians had their trolls and giants or Jotuns, also called Etins, who were great granitic beings of immense physical power and sometimes hairy of form. More mysterious were the dwarves, a race (or races) of stunted, powerful craftsmen and weapons-smiths. One race of dwarves was from Svartalfheim, the Land of the Dark Elves, a cavern world in its own right. Some of the Svartalf dwarf-kind lived in Nifleheim, the Land of the Dead. Along with the savage and man-eating trolls, the dwarves would turn to stone, into toads or otherwise die if struck by the direct rays of the Sun. More often than not, the entrances to their

homes were hidden in inaccessible mountainsides and other remote locations.

The Scandinavian and Germanic peoples also believed in the Huldre, the "hidden folk", or Elves. The Huldre domain was a luminous cavern realm called Alfheim. From Alfheim they would venture forth to cajole, abduct or seduce human beings. Other beings were the Kobolds, or mine dwarves, perhaps a variant of the Norse Svartalf. Another type was the Tusse, a variant of elf who lived close to humans, usually beneath or close to a farmstead.

The primary interest of the Huldre elf-folk, which could be said to apply to all the Germanic types, seems to have been procreation with human beings for the purpose of maintaining genetic diversity. Like

the trolls and dwarves, the elves seemed to dislike bright sunlight, but may have had more tolerance than their troll and dwarf cousins as they were sometimes seen at dawn, twilight or dusk, or by day in deeply shadowed valleys or mountain chasms. Huldre elves in particular are said to have dwelt beneath mounds and hills which were in closer proximity to human habitations, as trolls did more rarely. The elves took a regular interest in human affairs—weddings, births and deaths (bloodlines?), the success of crops and livestock and so forth—but only for their own selfish

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A hero fighting a scaled humanoid creature similar to a Greek gorgon. Note the creature's "third eye".

interests. They seemed to be overly concerned with genetic and biological diversity, and they pilfered livestock, crops and human genes via theft or cross-species liaison whenever they saw fit to do so. The elves are generally depicted as extremely fair-haired and fair-skinned.

Dragons were also said to live deep in the Earth, as recounted in the Anglo-Saxon (Germanic) saga of Beowulf. The monster Grendel was a hairy, scaled fiend, a Naga troll which later British traditions would call a "goblin" and modern cryptozoologists would term a "hairy humanoid". The term Pazuzu would probably have been just as appropriate for Grendel. Dragons were the special guardians of "buried treasure"; that is, buried knowledge or technology, much of it often made by the powers of the subterranean dwarves. The European dragon had a nastier disposition than his oriental counterpart, or perhaps he came into conflict with a group of people who entertained different philosophical ideals when it came to living in fear of man-eating entities; but whatever the case, like his Eastern cousins he had a relationship with both underground caverns and deep bodies of water.

England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland have rich traditions of under-earth dwellers, with many similarities or even common origins between them. Like the Norse/Germanic variants, the "fairies"—goblins, trows, knockers, brownies, leprechauns, Sidhe (shee), Tylwyth teg (terlooeth teig), and numerous other categories of humanoid beings—were fair or foul, malevolent or kind (actually, indifferent), making their homes almost without exception beneath the ground. Mounds, hills, ruins, ancient raths and hill-forts, mountains, cliffs and even cities of great age were said to serve as the rooftops of their palaces.

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Like the Nagas and dragons, some had the entrances to their subterranean homes at the bottom of lakes. To remove all doubt as to their relationship with Norse hidden-folk and Indian Nagas alike, they shunned the sunlight and often seemed interested in crossbreeding their own bloodlines with those of human beings, or even in crossbreeding their "livestock" or fairy cattle, horses, hounds and so forth with the surface species which were most compatible.

The goblin-dwarf Rumpelstiltskin, in his lust to have the human baby and its genetic bounty, is another example of this in German folklore.

Of particular interest are the Tuatha de Danaan of Ireland, the People of the Goddess Danu, also called the Sidhe. Originally an aristocratic warrior race of heroic proportion, they dwindled in size after retreating underground to become the Daoine Sidhe (Theena Shee) or diminutive faeries of Irish folklore. Most of the "gentry" or aristocratic trooping faeries are said to be of this type. Like the Scandinavian elves, they are depicted as particularly fair of complexion and hair. According to Lady Wilde in *Ancient Legends of Ireland* (Ward & Downey, London, 1887), "they are categorised as 'cave fairies'". In addition to their now familiar practice of abduction of and hybridisation with surface humans, their name Tuatha ("tribe" or "people") de Danaan holds a strong resemblance to the Egyptian name for the underworld: the Tuat. It is generally thought that the term

"fairy" or "faerie" has its origin in the earlier French term *fay* or the Latin *fatae*, but the possibility of an older origin, as hinted at by the Tuat/Tuatha connection, may in fact bear further examination—for did not the "Pharaohs" believe that they would journey through the Tuat on the way to their places in eternity?

The hills and glens of Ireland are also said to hide the remnants of at least three vanquished races: the Firbolgs, the Fomorians and the Nemedians. All are ancient enemies of the Tuatha de Danaan and were driven underground by the latter in the distant past, where they then dwindled in size (lack of genetic diversity?) at an even earlier time than did their conquerors. The Fomors and the Firbolgs are probably the origin-race of many of the bogeys and pookas (bucas), goblins and hobgoblins, Scottish trows and other malevolent, sometimes shapeshifting beings which seem to bear strong resemblance to the Scandinavian trolls, being perhaps a smaller variant. The etymological connection between "trows" and "trolls" is obvious, and reflects the sequence of both legendary and historical migrations to the British Isles as well as the wars between each newcomer group and the then-conquered one.

Each group of faeries and goblins can be viewed as the dethroned exiled gods of an earlier defeated human culture. The question is, what or who were these "gods" which still exist in the popular imagination today? Were they symbolic pantheons or archetypes, or living beings who pre-dated man on this planet?



Two examples of Utukku (Djinn or Genii), dispatched from the Ki-Gal to the surface world.

### 3. The New World

Native American cultures have similar beliefs in an extensive, layered realm of caverns which is hidden beneath their feet. This murky world is believed to be inhabited by both human and humanoid beings and by a variety of monsters and demons.

Most tribes or nations have their own traditions of subterranean "little people", as well as other motifs including reptilian or serpent-like humanoid beings. In addition to this, many tribes believe that they themselves emerged from a mythical underworld ages before.

The Mescalero Apache have many of these beliefs. One of their oldest sacred traditions states that they came from the Old Red Fire Land before the Great Flood. This land is said to have been in the distant eastern (Atlantic) sea but was destroyed by a combination of deluge and volcanic cataclysms. Escaping through "great caverns" and tunnel systems, the ancestors of the Apache came to high mountain lands far to the south, where they built new cities. A series of misfortunes there, however, eventually drove them northward.

This legend is nearly identical to the origin story as related in the *Chilam Balam* of the Maya, and brings to mind both Mayan and Aztec origin myths. The Aztecs say that they originated in a land called Aztlan, obviously synonymous with Atlan or Atlantis, the destruction of which they also escaped. After this, they ended up in a cavern world called Chicomoztoc, or the Seven Cavern Cities of Gold, where they lived for some time before emerging again into the surface world.

In addition to believing in a vast, nine-layered underworld filled with strange beings, the chief god of the Maya, called Itzamna (meaning "iguana house"), was depicted as an anthropomorphic lizard, snake, cayman or dragon. The underworld dwellers were a mixture of human, reptilian and other animal characteristics, and the rain-god Chac was a long-nosed, fanged, humanoid creature very similar to the Egyptian god Set.

The underworld, called Xibalba, is the location of most of the action in the *Popol Vuh*, a priestly epic of the Maya. In the *Popol Vuh*, two semi-divine brothers, Hunapuh and Xbalanque, have to journey into a realm of horrors beneath the earth in order to defeat those who are the enemies of their father and his family and who threaten their own ascendancy to power. In Xibalba, they come into conflict with Zipacna (a crocodile-headed monster), Seven Macaw (a bird-headed creature), the maker of earthquakes, and other familiar forms. An interesting event occurs when the vengeance-seeking brothers devise a way to pick out the 12 lords of Xibalba from identical "mannikins" or robotic Ushabti-like figures, so as to destroy the lords of the underworld. The twins eventually defeat their rivals and take over the rulership themselves, bringing an end to human sacrifice as part of the deal. These events preceded and made possible the "modern" epoch of time.

The Hopi of the southwest desert, descendants of the mysterious Anasazi people, have an equally strange tradition. They believe that as a people they migrated from a series of previously extant "worlds"—usually interpreted as "ages" or "epochs", but

they also see these as subsequent cavern worlds, each one lower than the next and each one eventually abandoned and destroyed in turn. While still in the murky "third world", the Hopi ancestors came into contact with the mysterious "ant people", an ectomorphic race or species which greatly resembles the Gala of Sumerian myth, and at some point they also came into conflict with the "ser-

pent people". Like other tribes, their underworld mythos is filled with cataclysms and floods. At least one of their previous worlds was said to have been "in the east". Combined with the flood element, this legend is very similar to Apache and Aztec traditions.

The Choctaw (Cha'ta) people of Mississippi also have a myth of underground origins. They believe that their ancestors emerged from the Nanih Waiya cave mound, a 50-foot-tall natural geological formation which is hidden in a swampy forest area, approximately one-and-a-half miles east of a better-known artificial mound and tourist site. The hill has several natural openings, some of which have been "sealed up" (the Park Service seems to have no good explanation for this), and it is said by the Choctaw to be the entrance to a vast underground realm.

One legend has it that in ancient times the Choctaw were invaded by a race of red- and blond-haired, white-skinned giants who bore "sharp clubs" (swords?) and axes and wore an extra, thick skin (chain or leather mail?) which made them impervious to arrow, spear

and warclub. Add the touch that some of these Nahullo, or giants, had "horns", and these white invaders sound suspiciously like wandering Norsemen. Whatever their origin or identity might have been, these invaders drove the Choctaw into hiding.

The world beneath the cave mound where the Choctaw hid was a large series of caverns through which a river or rivers ran (the

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Tengu, Japanese bird-headed (reptilian) humanoids

Nanhi Waiya cave mound sits squarely at the headwaters of the Pearl River). Some traditions indicate that it went on to connect to other "worlds" or underground places. Staying underground for many generations, the Choctaw emerged to wage a form of guerrilla warfare on their enemies, eventually winning by using darts coated with a poison made from mushrooms found in the caverns. Victorious, they emerged again into the sunlit world.

One tradition holds that this emergence of a generation of people born underground is the basis for the mound origin myth, and that the Choctaw had in fact arrived centuries earlier after leaving a "sunken land" which had foundered in a distant western ocean. After many wanderings and travails, they arrived in the southeast where they found the natural cavern mound which would later serve as a place of refuge. But other Choctaw beliefs dispute this, claiming that not just the Choctaw but the Muskogee, Cherokee and Chickasaw peoples emerged from the mound as well, having all been one people in the underworld.

Today the Choctaw still believe that a variety of strange supernatural beings either inhabit the cave mound or dwell in the wooded hills that surround it. One of these is the Shampe, a hair-covered, manlike giant who has a terrible odour and stays underground during the day. The Shampe is a sort of Sasquatch, but the underworld connection is there. Also present are the Kawana-kasha (Kowi Anukasha), also called Bohpoli ("stone-thrower"), a type of supernatural and mercurial dwarf living within not just the woods of Mississippi but within the cave mound itself. Like the Norse dwarves, they are hoarders of vast knowledge.

The mound is also the home of "giant serpents" and perhaps a host of other beings. Among the latter is the Nalusa Falaya, or "long black being", who is humanoid yet slides on his stomach "like a snake". His pointed ears only accentuate his reptilian appearance.

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Another variant is the Nalusa Chito, or "big black being", who emerges from underground dens to capture women and children presumably for supper. This abduction scenario is by now a familiar one and is very similar to the abduction and changeling accounts of Celtic and Scandinavian traditions which often describe abductions for the purposes of maintaining genetic diversity. The goblin Ho'koklonote'she is a shapeshifting creature believed to haunt the region, and is very similar to the Pooka or Buca of the British Isles. So are the Nalusa twins, for that matter.

As has been demonstrated, many similarities or perhaps identical descriptions exist for the underworld inhabitants of myth and folklore.

This underlying cohesion may have resulted from an "archetypal stew" which long simmered in the imaginations of men and women; and as will be demonstrated in the next section, this has resulted in some very interesting and imaginative works of fiction.

Continued in the next issue of NEXUS...

**About the Author:**

Wm Michael Mott is the Creative Director for a high-performance US software company. He is also a freelance artist and writer of both fiction and non-fiction. He has worked as an artist/designer for Fortune 500 companies and for a variety of book and magazine publishers. His artwork has appeared in publications such as *Computer Graphics World Magazine*, *Computer Artist*, *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*, *Dragon Magazine*, *UFO Magazine* and others. He's

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Mott's satirical fantasy novels, *Pulsifer: A Fable* and *Land of Ice, A Velvet Knife*, are published in electronic form by SoftBook Press/Gemstar, ([www.soft-book.com](http://www.soft-book.com)) and will soon also be available from the author in a deluxe illustrated version on CD-ROM. The first of a series of illustrated short stories appeared in September 2000 as a chapbook from Undaunted Press ([www.undauntedpress.com](http://www.undauntedpress.com)).

Mott has been researching Fortean and paranormal topics for over 20 years and has only recently decided to put the results of this research into written form, the result being the graphically rich book and CD-ROM, *Caverns, Cauldrons, and Concealed Creatures* (available from website <http://www.hiddenmysteries.com>). Wm Michael Mott can be contacted by e-mail at [mottimorph@earthlink.net](mailto:mottimorph@earthlink.net).

**Editor's Note:**

The bibliography accompanying this article will be published in a subsequent issue of NEXUS.



Examples of Egyptian underworld deities, the jackal-headed Anubis and Ammut